

**Using Content Analysis to Study Political Texts:  
Notes on Turkish Parliamentary Debates**

“This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in  
*Mediterranean Politics* on 12/08/2020, available at  
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13629395.2020.1809175>.”

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# **Using Content Analysis to Study Political Texts:**

## **Notes on Turkish Parliamentary Debates**

### **Abstract**

This article proposes that mixed-method content analysis is an apt and creative technique to investigate large amounts of political texts. To support this premise, it discusses the advantages of the method on a study that scrutinizes the political debates about Armenians in the Turkish parliament between 1960 and 1980. In so doing, this article not only demonstrates the benefits of mixed-method content analysis in examining Turkish political texts but also outlines the research procedures to encourage scholars to use this valuable method in other contexts.

**Keywords:** mixed-method content analysis, area studies, intergroup hostility, Turkish politics, parliamentary records, Armenians

### **Introduction**

Substantial amounts of texts are easily reachable with the parallel developments of the internet and digitalisation (Wilkerson & Casas, 2017). Social forum websites and online social media contain plenty of data on political opinions worldwide, and various governments made official documents available online. Recent technological advances also provided software tools to explore resources rapidly and from distance. Such changes, in turn, created new research opportunities and opened way for methodological innovations in the scholarship on politics. For example, Draege (2019) and Nefes (2018a, 2019) observe that the Turkish parliamentary proceedings became very convenient sources to analyse political decision-making, as they avail comprehensive data with regards to significant debates over time. This paper discusses the

value of mixed-method content analysis to make use of the vast amount of textual data and offers a way of analysis from a study of the author (Nefes, under review).

To start with a working definition, content analysis is ‘any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying specified characteristics of messages’ (Holsti, 1969: 26). Quantitative content analysis is a deductive approach that tests research hypotheses after systematically coding data into variables, and qualitative content analysis is an inductive method that reaches conclusions after an open and in-depth analysis of texts (White & Marsh, 2006). While quantitative analysis helps to examine texts precisely and systematically, qualitative analysis can present a more in-depth insight into both manifest and latent content. Juxtaposing these methods would provide a comprehensive perspective. This would be a valuable contribution to the academic literature on Turkish politics too. Aside from its potential for better elaboration and interpretation of large amounts of Turkish texts (Reams & Twale, 2008; Schulenberg, 2007), mixed-method content analysis affords advantages of generalization and triangulation (Gibson, 2017). Generalization is the method’s greater ability to draw evidence from different contexts basically by adding up more analyses than single-method studies. Triangulation, using different sources to test the validity of results, stimulates researcher creativity and enables the studies to be more accurate in their analyses (Jick, 1979).

In the following sections, this paper first discusses the value of the author’s use of mixed-method content analysis on a study, which presents an original way to integrate qualitative and quantitative analysis. In that regard, this article is an important and unique contribution to the scholarship, as there are not sufficient academic studies explicating the inventive process of mixing methods (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner, 2007) and none in the field of area studies. Besides, the sample study is the first research using mixed-methods in the analysis of the perception of Armenians in Turkish politics. The article concludes by a brief remark on the timeliness of mixed-methods in the analysis of political texts today.

## **Benefits of Mixed-method Content Analysis**

### ***The Perception of Armenians in Turkish Politics between 1960 and 1980***

#### *Topic and Context*

The paper (Nefes, under review) examines the function of threat perception on the negative descriptions of Armenians in Turkish parliamentary politics. To achieve that, it scrutinizes parliamentary discussions related to Armenians between 1960 and 1980. This is an under-examined period, which corresponds to the only bicameral parliamentary era in Turkish politics that was formed by the National Assembly of Turkey (*Millet Meclisi*) and the Senate of the Republic (*Cumhuriyet Senatosu*). Focusing on the period facilitates a consistent data collection, because the organization of the parliaments and politics in general drastically altered after the 1980 military coup in Turkey. In addition, it contains the milestones of modern Turkish-Armenian relations. For example, Turkey was confronted by an international pressure to accept the genocide allegations, and Uruguay became the first country to recognize the Armenian Genocide in 1965. This political tension was exacerbated by terror attacks of The Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA) between 1975 and 1990 mainly targeting Turkish diplomats and embassies (Gunter, 2007). Also, the conflict between Greeks and Turks in Cyprus, which has an Armenian minority, escalated to the Turkish military intervention in 1974.

#### *Theory*

The scholarship on the perception of Armenians in Turkey tends to underline exclusionary practices and hostility of the Turkish state and members of the public, triggered by various political tensions, such as the genocide debate and Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan (Dixon, 2010; Ozturk-Tuncel & Celikpala, 2019). Although some studies provide insights from the experience of the Armenian minority in Turkey

(Ekmekçioğlu, 2016), the academic literature predominantly explores the debates around the international recognition of the genocide claims (e.g., Avedian, 2013; Bilali, 2013; Göçek, 2016; Gürpınar, 2016). It tends to concentrate on individual events and does not systematically analyse Turkish mainstream politics with regards to the factors that contributed to the negative perceptions. In other words, the scholarship could benefit from a general theoretical perspective that can explain the negative perception in different periods and contexts. Building on the sociological perspective of group position theory (Blumer, 1958), which basically proposes that inter-group prejudice arises from dominant group members' perception of others as a threat to their prerogatives, the study affords such a systematic approach. It underlines the significance of the relationship between the perceived threats and negative descriptions of Armenians in Turkish politics.

### *Design and Procedures*

Our research team included a principle investigator (PI), Dr Turkey Salim Nefes, and a research assistant (RA), Mr Ari Sekeryan. There were three main reasons for employing Mr. Sekeryan as a RA. First, the PI had worked with him efficiently in similar projects that involved creation of datasets from the debates about conspiracy theories in the Turkish parliament (Nefes, 2018b). This helped to save time from induction and increased the project speed, as he already had the relevant experience of downloading the documents, coding variables and creating a dataset. Second, Mr. Sekeryan is a member of the Armenian community in Turkey. Therefore, when we coded the perception of Armenians as being negative or not, his opinion was imperative. The PI, a member of the Turkish majority in Turkey, might not be sensitive enough to the latent or symbolic descriptions of Armenians. In other words, the RA's Armenian identity contributed to the depth of data interpretation. Third and in line with the previous point, the RA was a doctoral student working on the history of Armenians in Turkey. He was not only knowledgeable but also very much interested in the topic. Future research projects on

comparable topics could benefit from establishing similar criteria for choosing research assistants.

The Turkish parliamentary records since 1908, including secret sessions (*Gizli Celse*), are available online in pdf format. The website has a keyword search function ([https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/td\\_v2.sorgu\\_ekrani](https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/td_v2.sorgu_ekrani)), which researchers can use to download materials of interest. However, this function only provides data from recent mentions. In the study, the PI and RA downloaded all parliamentary records between 1960 and 1980, because they wanted to be confident about unearthing all relevant data, and the search function might have had faults that we could not detect. Hence, they used the following link to download the records:

[https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/tutanak\\_dergisi\\_pdfler.meclis\\_donemleri?v\\_meclisdonem=0](https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/tutanak_dergisi_pdfler.meclis_donemleri?v_meclisdonem=0). Subsequently, they conducted checks for whether the search function in pdf files, which they relied on to create a dataset, help to find words precisely. As most of the electronic files were prepared by digitalising the existing documents, there might have been problems, such as missing certain words. To avoid that potential problem, the PI conducted checks in randomly selected documents by choosing a sentence from each document and testing whether the search function found each word in the sentence. This gave an estimation of whether the search would be missing any words. They recommend this practice for researchers undertaking similar studies to improve the validity of their findings. Furthermore, in the cases of having more than one pdf documents to search, they endorse to use ‘full reader search’ function in Acrobat Reader programme that allows to search for keywords in multiple files at once. This saves time in creating the dataset.

In its analysis of the mentions of the word Armenian in the Turkish parliamentary records between 1960 and 1980, the study took the individual speeches of the members of the parliament (MPs) as the unit of analysis. Initially, the RA downloaded the pdf files from the

parliamentary website and created a dataset template, which contained the following variables: debate topics, perception of Armenians, speaker's name and political party membership, ideological orientation of the political party and dates of the speeches. Subsequently, the PI and RA read the content of the speeches, created a coding book for the analysis as seen in table 1 below. They separately coded the main variables, perception of Armenians and debate topics. The former was the dependent variable, as the article searched for the underlying factors for the negative perception of Armenians. Debate topic was an independent variable, because, in line with group position theory, the paper proposed that politicians would be likely to describe Armenians negatively while discussing about their perceived security threats. In other words, it expected a significant relationship between debate topic and perception of Armenians in the parliamentary speeches. The other independent variable, ideological orientation of speaker's political party, was self-evident, and therefore, there was no need for double-coding. The PI and RA compared the codes where relevant and calculated the percentages of coding agreements as well as Scott's pi ( $\text{Pr}[\text{observed}] - \text{Pr}[\text{expected}] / 1 - \text{Pr}[\text{expected}]$ ) to measure the level of interrater reliability. They achieved satisfactory levels of interrater reliability: 100% agreement (Scott's pi=1) for the debate topics and 95% agreement (Scott's pi=.89) for the perception of Armenians. The high-levels of agreement was probably due to simple coding categories and clarity of the codebook as underlined by Sanders and Cuneo (2010). Last, the PI scrutinized the data using quantitative and qualitative content analyses. All in all, this practice not only strengthened the reliability of analysis but also provided a chance to examine data thoroughly, which could undoubtably contribute to future studies too.

Table 1. Codebook

Dependent Variable: Perception of Armenians	<b>NEGATIVE:</b> Description of Armenians' identity, existence or actions in unfavourable terms, which includes defending an unfavourable treatment or perception of Armenians.
	<b>NEUTRAL:</b> Description of Armenians' identity, existence or actions in value-free terms.
	<b>POSITIVE:</b> Description of Armenians' identity, existence or actions in favourable terms, which includes criticising an unfavourable treatment or perception of Armenians.
Independent Variable: Debate Topic	<b>SECURITY:</b> Debates on security threats, such as dismemberment threats and foreign threats.
	<b>EDUCATION:</b> Debates on the Turkish schooling system.
	<b>CULTURE:</b> Discussions on cultural products, such as folk music, architecture, literature and painting.
	<b>POLITICS:</b> Discussions about contemporary political developments and politicians, such as an individual politician's career achievements.
	<b>HEALTH:</b> Talks on the Turkish medical system.
	<b>FOREIGN RELATIONS:</b> Debates about diplomatic relations.
Independent Variable 2: Ideological orientations of the political parties	<b>RIGHT-WING:</b> Turkish nationalist and Islamist political parties, such as the Nationalist Action Party ( <i>Milliyetci Hareket Partisi</i> )
	<b>CENTRE-RIGHT:</b> Liberal political parties, such as the Justice Party ( <i>Adalet Partisi</i> )
	<b>CENTRE-LEFT:</b> Social-democratic political parties, such as the Republican People's Party ( <i>Cumhuriyetci Halk Partisi</i> )
	<b>LEFT:</b> Socialist and communist political parties, such as the Turkish Workers' Party ( <i>Turkiye Isci Partisi</i> )



The study clearly demonstrated the relationship between the perceived threats and negative perception of Armenians in Turkish politics by combining quantitative and qualitative content analysis effectively. The former presented a statistically significant relationship between MPs' speeches on security topics and negative descriptions of Armenians. Politicians tended to refer to Armenians unfavourably when they perceived security threats. This quantitative analysis is essential to see the overall picture given that the size of the dataset, which contains 164 speeches, is too large to explore solely by qualitative content analysis. In addition, the qualitative component of the paper complemented and triangulated the quantitative findings by (a) unveiling in detail the interplay between perceived security threats and negative descriptions of Armenians that included a consideration of the latent content of the speeches, (b) examining the contradictory cases to the main premise, such as the non-negative comments during the security debates, (c) exploring the speeches in which MPs used non-negative remarks to describe the contexts that did not trigger negative remarks about Armenians and (d) assessing the talks that contained both negative and non-negative descriptions to present how and in which circumstances politicians shifted their perceptions about Armenians.

In so doing, the paper elaborated the data meticulously by examining it from different methodological viewpoints. It provided a thorough interpretation by (1) providing a logistic regression analysis that precisely presented the statistical effect sizes of the categorical variables, (2) qualitatively exploring the cases and contexts that were not predicted by the statistical model, (3) unveiling the latent and manifest content of the speeches, and (4) enabling a more consistent analysis through interrater reliability. As the data were gathered from a single source, Turkish parliamentary proceedings, the study does not seem to have taken the advantage of generalization, drawing richer evidence from various contexts. Nevertheless, one could argue that generalization is still relevant, because the method enabled a detailed coverage

of a large amount of texts between 1960 and 1980, interpreting evidence from different political contexts and events.

## **Conclusion**

This paper presents a study that combined qualitative and quantitative content analysis efficiently and in an original manner. While doing so, this article highlights how the method helps to elaborate data better by drawing on different methodological perspectives, triangulate to afford a more reliable analysis and provide rigorous interpretations of data, as the sample study scrutinized both latent and manifest content of the data as well as combining a precise quantitative analysis with a confirmatory qualitative analysis. As always, good things do not happen by chance and come at a cost. Schram (2014: 2635) insightfully reminds us that ‘mixing both quantitative and qualitative methods in a study is a more challenging project than using the methods separately.’ Nevertheless, a part of the difficulty is a unique strength, because the technique forces creativity of to find the most efficient way of combining methods according to the demands of each study rather than using existing age-old templates.

All in all, the paper lauds the use of mixed-method content analysis in responding to the vast amount of political texts currently available. The method not only could help to produce more reliable and comprehensive research but also could assist in improving the accuracy of automated content analysis, another growing and promising field. In line with that, it should not go without noting that mixed-method content analysis is particularly important for area studies, because the main strength of the field is in its ability to provide a context-specific and detailed approach, which can be afforded by juxtaposing methods creatively.

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